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ABSTRACT

This publication is intended for teachers bringing a class to visit the National Archives in Washington, D.C., for a workshop on primary documents. The National Archives serves as the repository for all federal records of enduring value. Primary sources are vital teaching tools because they actively engage the student's imagination so that he or she may visualize past events and make sense of their reality and meaning. This publication concerns a workshop on the Declaration of Independence. In addition to the historical information on the Declaration, background on two documents involved in the workshop--the painting, "The Presentation of the Declaration," by Barry Faulkner, and the Dunlap Broadside (the first printed copy of the Declaration of Independence)--is included. Photographs of these two documents as well as two exercises for students also are provided. (DB)

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ED 364 452

"Our Lives, Our Fortunes and Our Sacred Honor"

The Declaration of Independence

SO 023 398

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"Our Lives, Our Fortunes and Our Sacred Honor"

FOR THE TEACHER

Thank you for arranging the primary document workshop **"Our Lives, Our Fortunes and Our Sacred Honor"** for your class. For too many students, history is just an endless string of dates and events chronicled in a textbook. Primary sources actively engage the student's imagination so that he or she may visualize past events and sense their reality and meaning. Before your workshop, it would be advantageous to introduce your students to primary sources with the poster-size documents and the attendant exercises we have provided. The exercises may be photocopied and should be adapted to fit your objectives and teaching style. We hope that these preliminary materials and our workshop will enhance your class' understanding and appreciation of the founding document of the United States, the Declaration of Independence.

The Declaration of Independence

On June 7, 1776, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia proposed a resolution to the Continental Congress, sitting on that day in the Statehouse in Philadelphia, "that these United Colonies are, and of right, ought to be, free and Independent States, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be, totally dissolved." Consideration of Lee's motion was postponed until June 8, but no final action was taken on that day. By June 10, when discussions were resumed, it became evident that the Congress was not quite ready to accept the motion, and final action was postponed again. Meanwhile, having decided that independence would eventually be decreed, the Congress decided to appoint a committee to draft a declaration to this effect. On June 11 five members of the Congress—Thomas Jefferson of Virginia, John Adams of Massachusetts, Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania, Roger Sherman of Connecticut, and Robert Livingston of New York—were assigned to the task.

The brilliant Jefferson, then only 33 years of age, was chosen to write the draft of the document. The young Virginian had first come into political prominence as a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses, and in 1774 he had written the political pamphlet entitled *A Summary View of the Rights of British America*. Quite interestingly, that same year it was printed at Philadelphia in the shop of John Dunlap, the man who would also print the first copies of the Declaration of Independence.

When preparing the text for the Declaration, Jefferson was no doubt inspired by the enlightened doctrines of Locke and Rousseau, proponents of what were then considered dangerous and revolutionary philosophies. But Jefferson drew most heavily upon the traditional basis of English law, so clearly evidenced by the Declaration's fundamental premise "that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed." This was a stroke of genius. You could hardly call an idea high treason if it was based on the underlying tenet of respectable English government. The British then could not possibly deny the colonies claim "that whenever any form of government shall become destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute new government."

On July 1 Congress reconvened and the following day Lee's resolution for independence was adopted. Immediately afterward, the Congress commenced its consideration of Jefferson's draft. Discussions continued for two more days, but finally on July 4, late in the day, the Declaration was formally adopted by the "Representatives of the United States of America in General Congress Assembled."

Jefferson had written our nation an eloquent birth certificate which would inspire people all over the world. In 1789, when the French people decided to stand up to the monarchy in defense of their rights, they found inspiration in Jefferson's words. In the 1820s, when colonists in South America sought independence from Spain, they turned to the same source. Jefferson's Declaration of Independence, like other documents that live and shape history, has had the eternal power to be filled with new ideas. Even in the 20th century, when indigenous peoples of Asia and Africa explained their struggles for independence, they still invoked the Declaration.

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The Presentation of the Declaration

by Barry Faulkner

The image on the front of your poster depicts how it might have looked when Jefferson and the committee submitted the Declaration to the president of the Continental Congress, John Hancock. This mural on canvas painted by Barry Faulkner hangs in the exhibit hall of the National Archives. Unveiled in 1936, the mural is neoclassical in style and mythical in setting. Although the figures represented are based on actual portrait busts, the mythical setting still compelled one of the painting's first viewers to remark that Mr. Faulkner "must have been reading Roman history and not American history." With this in mind, it would be interesting to ask your students what it must have really been like back in the dog days of July 1776. A KEY TO PERSONAGES has been enclosed.

The Dunlap Broadside

Once the Declaration was adopted, the Congress authorized its printing. John Hancock, as president of the Congress, signed the authenticated copy, which Charles Thomson, as secretary, attested. The Congress further authorized: "That the committee appointed to prepare the declaration superintend & correct the press; That copies of the declaration be sent to several Assemblies, Conventions & Committees or Councils of Safety and to the several Commanding officers of the Continental troops that it be proclaimed in each of the United States & at the head of the Army." There is no detailed account to tell us how the committee of five carried out this commission. We do know, however, that one or more of the committee members took the authenticated copy signed by John Hancock, quite likely a fair copy of the text in Jefferson's hand, to the printing shop of John Dunlap, the Congress's official printer. The number of copies John Dunlap printed on the night of July 4 is unknown, but there are 24 known copies of these so-called "Dunlap broadsides." The reproduction on the back of your poster is a copy of the broadside that was folded and inserted in the "rough journal" of the Continental Congress for July 4.

As your students work through the exercises concerning the broadside copy of the Declaration, they will discover one of the most widely held misconceptions in American history. Legend has it that the Declaration was signed on July 4, 1776, but the broadside copy has a notable lack of signatures. Why is this so? On July 19, only after all 13 colonies had individually approved of the Continental Congress's actions, did the Congress order the Declaration to "be fairly engrossed on parchment, with the title and stile of 'The unanimous declaration of the thirteen United States of America,' and that the same, when engrossed, be signed by every member of Congress." Finally, on August 2, it was formally signed. It is this Declaration "fairly engrossed on parchment" that now stands on display in the exhibit hall of the National Archives.

Uncovering this myth presents you with an excellent opportunity to discuss with your class the consequences involved in signing a document that could be either your birthright or your death warrant. A number of delegates who voted for adoption of the Declaration on July 4 were never to sign despite the July 19 order. For instance, Robert Livingston, one of the committee of five appointed to draft the Declaration, thought it premature to sign and so never did.

What is the National Archives?

Established in 1934, the National Archives helps preserve our nation's history by serving as the repository for all federal records of enduring value. It thus serves the federal government, researchers of many topics, and the American public. Because federal records reflect and document more than 200 years of American development, the records in the National Archives holdings are great in number, diverse in character, and rich in information.

Before your students participate in a tour or a workshop, they should be familiar with the mission of the National Archives. We recommend that you present your students with the following vocabulary words and questions:

- *Please define Archives, Archivist, Document, Record, Preservation.*
- *Why do you and your family save documents? Why are they important?*
- *The U.S. government keeps its records in the National Archives. Why does the government save its records?*
- *What kinds of records might the U.S. government want to save?*
- *What famous documents are at the National Archives?*

You will be called by the National Archives docent assigned to your class about a week before the date of your tour or workshop. If the workshop will be held in your classroom, then please be prepared to relay information concerning directions, parking, and school check-in procedures.

Whether it is our Behind-the-Scenes Tour or one of our Primary Document Workshops, we are confident that the experience will provide an exciting new look at history. In order to assess our performance, we would appreciate your cooperation in completing the enclosed evaluation form and returning it in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided.

If you have any additional questions regarding your tour or workshop, please contact the Volunteer and Tour Office Staff at 202-501-5205.

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Exercise I:

The Faulkner Mural

Study the photograph carefully. Examine the people, the architecture, the background, and any other objects in the painting.

1. What is the title of the mural? _____

2. How many people are portrayed? _____

3. What is the central object in the mural? Who is holding the object?

_____

_____

4. What activity is being depicted? What is the year?

_____

_____

5. What is the style of architecture? _____

6. When do you think this mural was painted? Why?

_____

_____

7. Do you think the artist depicted the event realistically? Why or why not?

_____

_____

_____

8. How do you think the event really happened? How would you have painted it?

_____

_____

_____

Exercise II:

The Dunlap Broadside

Read the written document carefully. In your history textbook there is another copy of this document. Compare and contrast the two copies.

1. What is the date and title of the document?

   _____

2. What are the names and offices of the people at the bottom of the page?

   _____

3. Does your textbook copy show more names? If yes, then why?

   _____

   _____

4. Why does your textbook copy indicate that it is a "unanimous" declaration and the copy provided does not? _____

   _____

5. Who is the principal author? And what "Truths" does he claim to be "self-evident?"

   _____

   _____

6. List three "repeated Injuries and Usurpations" the King of Great Britain has committed.

   _____

   _____

7. What powers do "FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES" have?

   _____

   _____

Essay Topic: Would you pledge your "life, fortune, and sacred honor" in support of this Declaration? Why or why not?

The Presentation of the Declaration of Independence
Mural by Barry Faulkner, c.1936
National Archives Rotunda

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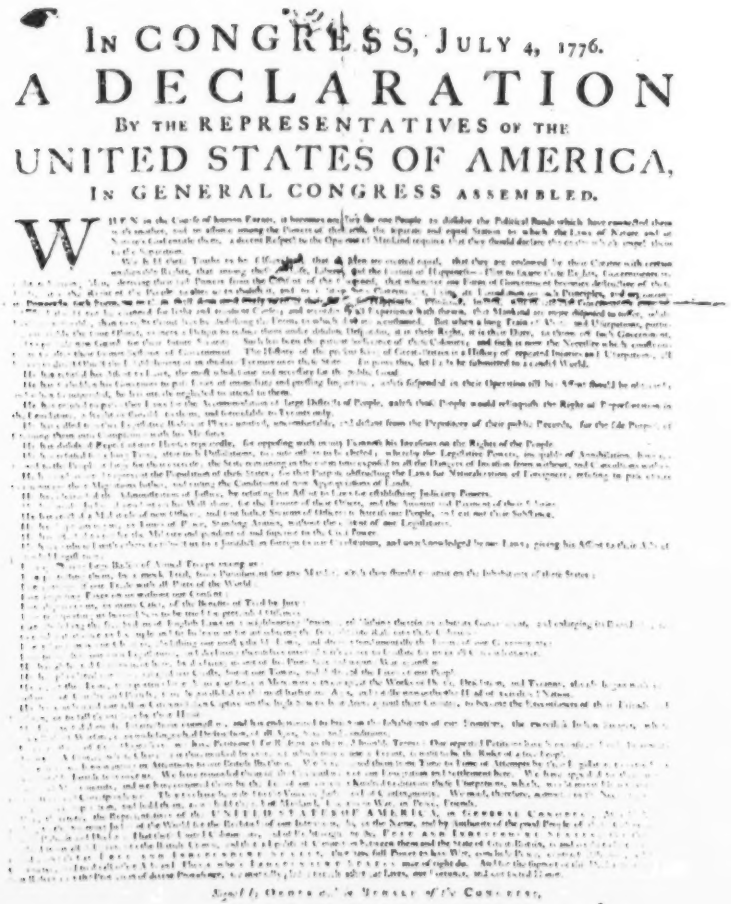
IN CONGRESS, JULY 4, 1776.

A DECLARATION

BY THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

IN GENERAL CONGRESS ASSEMBLED.



Signed by ORDER and in BEHALF of the CONGRESS,

JOHN HANCOCK, PRESIDENT.

ATTEST.
CHARLES THOMSON, SECRETARY.

PHILADELPHIA: PRINTED BY JOHN DUNLAP.

Dunlap Broadside
First printed copy of the Declaration of Independence
National Archives

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